

# Minutes of the GOVERNOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE

Monday, September 28, 2020 | 2:00 p.m.

## Committee Members Present:

Mary Liz Holberg, Peter Bell, Patrick Born, John (Jay) Cowles, Pahoua Yang Hoffman, James Hovland, Elizabeth Kautz, Douglas Loon, Mary Jo McGuire, Khani Sahebjam, George Schember, Alene Tchourumoff, Thomas Weaver, Janet Williams, Zhirong (Jerry) Zhao

## Committee Members Absent:

None

## CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chair Mary Liz Holberg called the meeting of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Committee to order at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, September 28, 2020.

## INFORMATION

1. Metropolitan Council Role as Metropolitan Planning Organization (Nick Thompson, Director, Metropolitan Transportation Services; Amy Vennewitz, Deputy Director, Metropolitan Transportation Services)

Nick Thompson and Amy Vennewitz gave a presentation on the Council's status as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region. The Metropolitan Council is the designated planning agency for any long-range comprehensive transportation planning required by section 134 of the Federal Highway Act of 1962, Section 4 of Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 and Section 112 of Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973 and other federal transportation laws. MPOs must exist within all urbanized areas with a population greater than 50,000. There are approximately 400 MPOs across the country and there are eight in Minnesota. Urbanized areas with a population greater than 200,000 serve as Transportation Management Areas (TMA). TMAs allocate federal transportation funds and approve all spending of federal funds in the MPO area. The Council is the only TMA in Minnesota and is the 17th largest MPO by population nationally. After each census, the federal government defines urbanized areas (UZA) based upon population density and contiguous density and contiguous development. After the 2010 census, portions of Wright and Sherburne counties as well as Houlton, WI were defined as urbanized and required to be added to the MPO.

The backbone of federal law is the requirement for a 3C Planning Process. The 3C planning process means that it is cooperative, comprehensive and continuing. The core responsibilities of an MPO are to: establish a setting for effective decision-making; identify and evaluate transportation improvement options; prepare and maintain a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP); develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP); identify performance measurement targets and monitor whether implemented projects are achieving targets; involve the public; demonstrate air quality conformity for MPOs on air quality non-attainment and maintenance areas; and implement a Congestion Management Process for large MPOs.

The Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) is an advisory body established by state law, comprised of 34 members: 18 elected officials (seven county, ten city, one Suburban Transit Provider); four agency representatives (MnDOT, MAC, MPCA, Council); eight citizens appointed by the Council; and four modal representatives (one freight, two transit, one bicycle/pedestrian). Local elected officials participate in selecting and approving

federally funded projects through Regional Solicitation and TIP. TAB recommends the program of projects for federal funding and the Council then concurs or denies the program. They also provide comments and review of planning products. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) advises the TAB and provides technical support, recommendations and review.

The Metropolitan Council was designated as the MPO in 1973 by Governor Wendell Andersen. In 1991 the federal ISTEA Act which included MPO membership requirements “grand-fathered in” non-conforming MPOs. The Council’s status as the MPO has been reaffirmed by the USDOT on four occasions: January 2011, August 2015, February 2016, and August 2018. A metropolitan planning organization may be redesignated by agreement between the Governor and units of general purpose local government that together represent at least 75 percent of the existing planning area population (including the largest incorporated city (based on population) as determined by the Bureau of the Census) as appropriate to carry out this section.

Janet Williams commented that there seems to be an emphasis on transportation rather than bicycle or pedestrian. Thompson replied that the next regional planning document takes a deeper look at all regional modes of transportation. Williams also asked why Sherburne and Wright counties would be considered part of the Council MPO rather than the MPO in St. Cloud. Thompson clarified that per the federal designation of contiguous land use, Sherburne and Wright would be considered a part of the Twin Cities MPO.

Jerry Zhao asked for an explanation of the differences of the Council as an MPO, and why the Council needed to be “grandfathered in.” The key difference is that an MPO should have elected officials, but the Council has appointed officials. Janet Williams commented that the Council Members are appointed by the Governor, though it is not always mentioned that the appointment process includes elected officials on the nominating committees. George Shember asked if the MPO is just for transit. Wastewater treatment and other Council operations are not a part of the MPO.

Tom Weaver asked Nick Thompson to comment on the efficiency of the current MPO status. Thompson responded that the Council has strong regional planning processes and TAB works well as an advisory board. Committee members also had questions about TAB and transit, and the transit process if it were not operated by an MPO. Thompson responded that often they have another transit governing board. Pat Born and Khani Sahebjam asked how an MPO would function if it was moved away from the Council. Amy Vennewitz mentioned that the MPO is prohibited from being a part of the state Department of Transportation. Elizabeth Kautz asked what problem would be solved by the MPO, and what would happen to the opt-outs if the MPO were moved. Chair Mary Liz Holberg commented that she does not yet know what the outcome will be from this committee, and what direction the committee will take.

## 2. Greater Minnesota MPO Overview (Tim Henkel, Assistant Commissioner, Modal Planning & Planning Management)

Tim Henkel, Minnesota Department of Transportation, gave a presentation on the MPOs in Greater Minnesota. There are seven greater Minnesota MPOs that lead planning in urbanized areas of more than 50,000 people. These MPOs are responsible for policymaking in these areas, based on the 3C Planning Process. Metropolitan Council is currently the only Transportation Management Area (TMA) in Minnesota; the Fargo-Moorhead Council of Governments is expected to be designated as a TMA after the 2020 census. Four of the Greater MN MPOs are interstate agencies. All of the seven Greater MN MPOs are made up of some, if not all, elected officials. Greater MN MPOs play a coordinating role in selecting projects. They do not receive direct appropriation like the Council.

Alene Tchourumoff asked if the governor of Wisconsin would need to approve changes to the MPO designation. She also asked if the Greater MN MPOs have additional functions and responsibilities other than transportation planning. Henkel responded that only the COGs have responsibilities that go farther than transportation planning; the MPOs function just as planning agencies. Khani Sahebjam asked about MPO designation and if there is any forecasted redesignation for Sherburne and Wright counties. Committee members had other questions and comments about greater Minnesota MPOs and funding, as well as federal transit funding.

### 3. Committee Discussion

Chair Mary Liz Holberg gave a brief preview of upcoming meetings. Mary Jo McGuire asked if future meetings would discuss the economic role of the Council or housing, or if the committee would focus on transportation. Chair Holberg replied that it will be decided by the group. Khani Sahebjam asked for a summary of historic positions that have been taken on the Council's status as MPO. Judd Schetnan replied that several letters were provided and will be posted on the website. Veto letters provided also include broader Council governance, including bills passed related to staggered terms and an elected Council. He does not have a library of the letters but can look into finding more information.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

Bridget Toskey  
Recording Secretary